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ABSTRACT

This book describes a study of the uses of reading and writing in Lancaster, England, in the 1990s. It offers a detailed, specific description of literacy practices in one local community at one point in time. The book is designed to contribute to the theoretical understanding of literacy by linking literacy to a more general understanding of social practices and how people make sense of their lives through their everyday practices. It also offers an alternative public policy position promoting the role of literacy as a communal resource contributing to the quality of local life. The book is based upon an ethnographic study that documents in detail literacy practices through interviews, documents, and observation, and also looks at the history and cultural traditions on which these practices rest. The first four chapters of the book provide information that creates the setting for the empirical study, covering theory, historical background, contemporary context, and methodology. The second section of the book consists of four chapters each of which provides a detailed picture of the literacy life of an individual person. The third section of the book contains six chapters that explore particular themes about literacy and draw upon data from the full range of people who were interviewed and observations that were made. An afterword (chapter 15) reflects on how the findings from this local study can be related to literacy practices in other times and places. The appendixes contain further information about the research and its implications. The book contains 205 references. (KC)

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